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# HISTORICAL SYNTHESIS

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### HISTORICAL SYNTHESIS

SOME forty years ago Thomas Buckle published the famous work in which he denounced the historical method then in use and attributed the failure of historians to raise history to the rank of the natural sciences to intellectual inferiority on their part. Of the zeal displayed in research and "of the immense value of that vast body of facts" that had been brought together Buckle had only words of praise. "But if, on the other hand," he went on, "we are to describe the use that has been made of these materials, we must draw a very different picture. The unfortunate peculiarity of the history of man is, that although its separate parts have been examined with considerable ability, hardly any one has attempted to combine them into a whole and ascertain the way in which they are connected with each other. In all the other great fields of inquiry the necessity of generalization is universally admitted, and noble efforts are being made to rise from particular facts in order to discover the laws by which those facts are governed. So far, however, is this from being the usual course of historians, that among them a strange idea prevails, that their business is merely to relate events, which they may occasionally enliven by such moral and political reflections as seem likely to be useful."<sup>1</sup>

Buckle believed that "the establishment of this narrow standard" had led to results "very prejudicial to the progress of our knowledge." He acknowledged that "since the early part of the eighteenth century, a few great thinkers" had indeed arisen, who had deplored "the backwardness of history," and had done everything in their power to remedy it. These instances had, however, been extremely rare, and it seemed desirable to him that something

<sup>1</sup> Henry Thomas Buckle, *History of Civilization in England* (2 vols., New York, 1871), I. 3.

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should be done "on a scale far larger" than had hitherto been attempted, "and that a strenuous effort should be made to bring this great department of inquiry to a level with other departments, in order that we may maintain the balance and harmony of our knowledge." He hoped "to accomplish for the history of man something equivalent, or at all events analogous," to what had been effected "by other inquirers for the different branches of natural science. In regard to nature, events apparently the most irregular and capricious have been explained and have been shown to be in accordance with certain fixed and universal laws. This has been done because men of ability, and above all, men of patient, untiring thought, have studied natural events with the view of discovering their regularity; and if human events were subjected to a similar treatment, we have every right to expect similar results. . . . This expectation of discovering regularity in the midst of confusion is so familiar to scientific men, that among the most eminent of them it becomes an article of faith; and if the expectation is not generally found among historians, it must be ascribed partly to their being of inferior ability to the investigators of nature, and partly to the greater complexity of those social phenomena with which their studies are concerned." He claimed that "the most celebrated historians are manifestly inferior to the most successful cultivators of physical science: no one having devoted himself to history who in point of intellect is at all to be compared with Kepler, Newton, or many others that might be named." He added, in a foot-note, that he spoke "merely of those that made history their main pursuit. Bacon wrote on it, but only as a subordinate object; and it evidently cost him nothing like the thought which he devoted to other subjects."<sup>1</sup>

The idea of raising history to the rank of a science by generalizing upon the social facts and by establishing laws did not originate with Buckle. He had been preceded by Comte, to whom he refers as "a living writer who has done more than any other to raise the standard of history." Comte, Buckle tells us, "contemptuously notices 'l'incohérente compilation de faits déjà improprement qualifiée d'histoire.'"<sup>2</sup>

It is well known that the work of Buckle created a sensation. The discussion that it called forth has engaged the attention of a generation of scholars. To scientists the claim made by Buckle, that history could be made a science only by applying to social phenomena the method that had accomplished so much in investi-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I. 4.

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gating physical phenomena, appeared almost if not quite axiomatic ; to historians it was rank heresy. They not only denied that they had anything to do with historical laws, but asserted that such things could not be. The arguments made by the historians were not convincing. Droysen, in his defense of the historical method,<sup>1</sup> acknowledged that "our science has not yet set its theory and system on a firm footing." "The recognition will not be denied to historical studies," he said, "that even they have some part in the intellectual movement of our age, that they are active in discovering the new, in investigating anew what has been transmitted, and in presenting results in appropriate form. But when asked their scientific justification and their relation to the other circles of human knowledge, when asked what is the foundation of their procedure, what the connection of their means and their problems, they are, up-to date, in no condition to give satisfactory information."

These questions Droysen did not answer in a convincing manner. When he asked, "Is there, then, never more than one way, one method of knowledge? Do not its methods incessantly vary according to their objects?", he was touching the root of the whole discussion; but he did not make clear what these methods are that give us respectively natural science or history. He claimed that the mind "apprehends spatial manifestations as nature and temporal occurrences as history; not because they are so and so distinguished objectively, but in order to be able to grasp and think them"; but he offered no satisfactory discussion of the logical difference between the synthesis of the natural sciences and of history. He even rendered the problem more complicated by treating history as a science of the moral world.

The real point at issue — although not fully understood by either side in the debate — was a question of synthesis, of what form should be given to the facts that had been established as the result of the critical work. To improve the work of criticism, to lay down axioms for the establishment of the historical facts, would in no wise meet the objections of the natural scientist to the method — or the absence of method, as he considered it — of the historian. This was, however, exactly what Rhomberg hoped to do in his monograph entitled *Die Erhebung der Geschichte zum Range einer Wissenschaft*.<sup>2</sup> While the work was a valuable contribution to the litera-

<sup>1</sup>The discussion of the subject by Droysen is found in the two articles entitled "The Elevation of History to the Rank of a Science" and "Nature and History," translations of which are appended to the translation, by Dr. Andrews, of Droysen's *Grundriss*, under the title *Outline of the Principles of History* (Boston, 1893).

<sup>2</sup>Adolf Rhomberg, *Die Erhebung der Geschichte zum Range einer Wissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1883). Rhomberg chose for the motto of his book, "Erst die Gewissheit



ture of historical criticism, it had no influence, naturally, upon a discussion that dealt with the question of historical synthesis.

Although the natural scientists appeared to have the better of the argument — for logic offered no aid to the historian — men did not cease to write history in the old way. There seemed to be a feeling that even if the historical method could not be justified in the eyes of natural scientists, even if it were not scientific, it was doing something that needed to be done, and that could not be done by the use of the method of natural science. It was noticeable, however, that by the side of history was growing up a new science, dealing also with the life of man in society, but employing the method of natural science and engaged in the search for regularity and law. This science had accepted the name employed by Comte<sup>1</sup>, and called itself sociology. It even claimed to be the science of history that Buckle had hoped to call into being. History was simply a work of “erudition”<sup>2</sup>; the task of the historian was to prepare the material from which the laws of the sociologist were to be derived. The historian refused, however, to play the rôle of man-servant to the new science, and the discussion lived on although conducted with less vigor than in the days of Buckle.

Some ten years ago, new life was breathed into the controversy by Professor Lamprecht of Leipzig. He announced the discovery of a new historical method the application of which would give a

macht die Wissenschaft zur Macht.” In his statement of the problem (p. 12) he said, “Was nun der Historiker gewiss zu machen hat, das ist eigentlich die *Thatsächlichkeit* des gemeldeten Factums.” Certainty concerning the facts of history would, he believed, raise history to the rank of a science. The same idea appears in Bernheim, *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode* (edition of 1894), 237.

<sup>1</sup> Paul Barth, *Die Philosophie der Geschichte als Sociologie* (Leipzig, 1897), 33, note.

<sup>2</sup> P. Lacombe, *De l'Histoire Considérée comme Science* (Paris, 1894), VII. 3. The attitude of the sociologist for a long time — and for the most of them even to-day — toward the historical method is well formulated by Lacombe: “Je rapelle en mon esprit la définition de la science, et je me dis: Si les hommes, dans leurs actes, dans leur conduite, ont jamais présenté quelque similitude, celle-ci pourra faire l'objet d'une proposition générale. L'histoire sera une science possible, dans la mesure où ces similitudes s'offriront. Par contre, si l'humanité n'a aucune ressemblance avec elle-même, si la conduite de chacun des hommes qui ont passé a parfaitement différé de la conduite des autres, l'histoire ne sera jamais une science.”

Louis Bordeau, *L'Histoire et les Historiens* (Paris, 1888), 1: “L'histoire est toute à refaire ou plutôt elle n'est pas encore faite. Les fondements mêmes de la science sont à établir. La construction attend son architecte. A peine peut-on dire que le passé nous a légué des matériaux. . . . [One of the conditions of a science is that] les connaissances acquises doivent pouvoir être formulées en lois. . . . [History did not meet this requirement] sa capacité d'établir des lois, nulle.”

Paul Mougelle, *Les Problèmes de l'Histoire* (Paris, 1886), 40, in which he considers the problems of sociology, assumes that it is a question of *either* history *or* sociology: “On peut dire qu'aucun historien avant Montesquieu, sans en excepter Bodin lui-même, n'a aperçu clairement l'idée de loi.”



“new history.”<sup>1</sup> It was simply the old question of historical synthesis, this time treated clearly as a question of synthesis. Stripped of all its local and temporal peculiarities, it was simply the old attempt to raise history to the rank of a science by applying to it the method of the natural sciences. The proof of this statement would seem to be found in the fact that in spite of his theories Lamprecht's history did not differ in form from that of the historians that had preceded him,<sup>2</sup> and that if he had applied his theory he would have produced a sociology and not a history. It is not my purpose to add to the controversial literature that has been produced in the discussion between Lamprecht and his opponents. I would simply call attention to the fact that Lamprecht asserts that the old historical synthesis is unscientific and that there is but one scientific method of approach to any subject of investigation.<sup>3</sup> It is the purpose of this article to raise a reasonable doubt upon the question that has been the whole matter at issue between the historians and the natural scientists during the last half-century.

This question that has long divided the world of scholars is evidently, in the last analysis, a question of logic and of the theory of knowledge. It is the question asked by Droysen, but as yet unanswered: “Is there, then, never more than one way, one method of knowledge? Do not its methods incessantly vary according to their objects?” To this question the old logic gave no answer, or it assumed that there is but one kind of knowledge worth seeking and but one method. Logic was under the spell of the natural sciences. It had grown up under the influence of the natural sciences, it selected nearly all of its illustrations from them, and its

<sup>1</sup> Lamprecht's theory is formulated in *Die kulturhistorische Methode* (Berlin, 1900), and in an article entitled “Über den Begriff der Geschichte und über historische und psychologische Gesetze,” in the *Annalen der Naturphilosophie*, Vol. II., No. 2. History is “die Wissenschaft von den seelischen Veränderungen menschlicher Gemeinschaften” (*Die kulturhistorische Methode*, 15). What is sociology? Science “ist nichts anderes als der Versuch, die Welt der Erscheinungen höheren Begriffen und Begriffssystemen zu unterstellen, als sie die Sprache schon darbietet” (*Ibid.*, 6). Concepts with general or with individual contents? Are these “systems” of concepts laws or complex wholes? Lamprecht's concepts are evidently concepts with general contents (*Ibid.*, 25-29). Lamprecht's distinction between *Geschichtsschreibung* and *Geschichtswissenschaft* is evidently the same thing as history and sociology (*Ibid.*, 35).

<sup>2</sup> “Meine Deutsche Geschichte ist das erste historische Werk, das nach den Begriffen solcher Kulturzeitalter disponiert ist und damit die Entwicklung des deutschen Volkes nach den Forderungen der kulturhistorischen Methode darstellt” (*Ibid.*, 26). That there is any logical difference between the method employed in writing the volume of this history devoted to the German Reformation and the method employed by Ranke in dealing with the same subject is not clear to the uninitiated.

<sup>3</sup> In both the articles referred to above he traces the history of the development of the sciences and endeavors to make clear why historical science has not kept pace in its development with the natural sciences.

general theories were constructed upon a natural-science basis.<sup>1</sup> It had not, for the most part, occurred to the modern logician that there could be any other point of view. When the natural scientist asserted that the method of the historian was illogical, he was speaking by the book; logic bore him out. If, now, logic should free itself, should discover that the method is determined by the end; that there is no one method that can give us the whole truth; that there are some things that we want to know, that we have a right to know, and that cannot be discovered by the method of natural science, then historical science would come at last to a consciousness of its method and would be able to justify its procedure.

While Lamprecht was congratulating himself that the new school of historians had driven the old school from the field or had left to them the pursuit of something that could not logically be called a science,<sup>2</sup> this long domination of the natural-science method in logic was coming to an end and the foundation upon which he had built up his theories was being undermined. As early as 1888, in his study *Zur Lehre von der Definition*, Rickert had attacked the idea of a universal natural-science method and had sought to show "how meaningless the theory is in accordance with which the common elements of things are identical with the essential characteristics of their concepts." "It had become clear to me," he wrote later, "that there is always need of a definite object by means of which the essential characteristics may be separated from the unessential; and that, in theories of methods, the important thing is to become acquainted with these various objects in order to understand and do justice to the manifoldness of scientific methods."<sup>3</sup> In the same year appeared the treatise by Naville entitled *De la Classification des Sciences*, in which he arranged the sciences in three groups: the first, entitled "histoire," comprised the sciences of the reality; the second, or "théorématique," dealing with what might be called the natural sciences, he characterized as "the sciences of the necessary

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelm Windelband, *Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft* (Strassburg, 1900, zweite Auflage), 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> "Die Geschichtsschreibung bleibt nach wie vor ein künstlerisches Geschäft, denn sie wirkt auf die Anschauung und beschäftigt sich gewöhnlich mit dem was an den geschichtlichen Vorgängen als singular erscheint" (*Die kulturhistorische Methode*, 35). It is clear from Professor Dow's article on "Features of the new History" (*AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW*, April, 1898), in which he makes a synthesis of Lamprecht's ideas as found in his different pamphlets, that the "old method," largely outgrown, is being rapidly replaced by the "new method," based upon psychology and seeking for the "typical stages" in social development. "Whatever the rational has not yet conquered" is left to those "who see at the basis the singular, not the regular."

<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Rickert, *Zur Lehre von der Definition* (Freiburg i. B., 1888). The quotation is from the *Vorwort* to *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*.

conditions of the possible, or the sciences of law."<sup>1</sup> Simmel in 1892 declared that "In so far as it is the affair of historical science to describe what has actually occurred, in that it is above all things the science of reality, it stands in the sharpest imaginable contrast to all sciences of law."<sup>2</sup> Finally in 1894 Windelband,<sup>3</sup> rejecting the common division of the sciences into *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*, and adopting as the principle of division the end aimed at, proposed the classification *sciences of law* and *sciences of events*, or in other words, natural science and history. Two years later Rickert published the first part of his work *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*.<sup>4</sup> It was the negative portion of his treatise, and I shall deal with it in connection with the positive treatment of the theory that appeared in 1902.

All of these conceptions of the relation of natural science to historical science had much in common, and testified to a coming change in the conception of the logic of the sciences. The literature of the discussion was enriched in 1899 by two important contributions, one by a psychologist, Münsterberg,<sup>5</sup> the other by an

<sup>1</sup>Rickert, *Die naturwissenschaftliche Begriffsbildung*, 299. Naville's monograph is out of print and I have been unable to obtain a copy of it. In 1901 M. Naville reprinted his work under the title *Nouvelle Classification des Sciences*. He there defines history as the "science des réalités diverses dans l'espace et changeantes dans le temps" (Berr in *Revue de Synthèse Historique*, June, 1902, 294). Berr notes "une tendance croissante à faire d'une définition de l'histoire la base de la classification des sciences" (*Ibid.*).

<sup>2</sup>Georg Simmel, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie* (Leipzig, 1892), 43.

<sup>3</sup>Wilhelm Windelband, *Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft*, 16-19.

<sup>4</sup>The first three chapters of the work appeared in 1896, the last two in 1902. The chapters and their subdivisions are as follows: I. Die begriffliche Erkenntnis der Körperwelt. (1) Die Mannigfaltigkeit der Körperwelt und ihre Vereinfachung durch die allgemeine Wortbedeutung. (2) Die Bestimmtheit des Begriffes. (3) Die Geltung des Begriffes. (4) Dingbegriffe und Relationsbegriffe. (5) Die mechanische Naturauffassung. (6) Beschreibung und Erklärung. II. Natur und Geist. (1) Physisch und Psychisch. (2) Die begriffliche Erkenntnis des Seelenlebens. (3) Naturwissenschaft und Geisteswissenschaft. III. Natur und Geschichte. (1) Die naturwissenschaftliche Begriffsbildung und die empirische Wirklichkeit. (2) Der Begriff des Historischen. (3) Die historischen Bestandtheile in den Naturwissenschaften. (4) Naturwissenschaft und Geschichtswissenschaft. IV. Die historische Begriffsbildung. (1) Das Problem der historischen Begriffsbildung. (2) Das historische Individuum. (3) Die teleologische Begriffsbildung. (4) Der historische Zusammenhang. (5) Die geschichtliche Entwicklung. (6) Die naturwissenschaftlichen Bestandtheile in den historischen Wissenschaften. (7) Geschichtswissenschaft und Geisteswissenschaft. (8) Die historischen Kulturwissenschaften. V. Naturphilosophie und Geschichtsphilosophie. (1) Die naturalistische Geschichtsphilosophie. (2) Die empirische Objektivität. (3) Die metaphysische Objektivität. (4) Der erkenntnistheoretische Subjektivismus. (5) Die kritische Objektivität. (6) Naturwissenschaftliche und historische Weltanschauung.

<sup>5</sup>Münsterberg's paper was read before the American Philosophical Society, and appeared in the *Psychological Review* (January, 1899). The title was "History and Psychology." It was reprinted in 1899 as chapter five, or as the fifth paper, in *Psychology and Life*.

historian, Xénopol.<sup>1</sup> Münsterberg, wishing to free psychology from the danger of a too intimate association with history, attempted a new classification of the sciences that he might assign to each its own province. While he declared himself in sympathy with the effort of German logicians to separate psychology from history, and looked upon such "logical separation as a liberating deed," he considered the arguments that had led to this separation "mistaken and untenable in every respect." He asserted that the difference between psychology and history is "not in the kind of treatment, but in the material itself", psychology dealing with objects, history with subjective will-attitudes. He formed four groups of sciences corresponding to four groups of facts in reality :

We have the science of the over-individual objects, that is, physics ; secondly, the science of the individual objects, that is, psychology ; thirdly, the sciences of the over-individual will-acts, that is, the normative sciences ; and last, and not least, the sciences of the individual will-acts, that is, the historical sciences. Physics and psychology have thus to do with objects ; history and the normative systems, ethics, logic, esthetics, deal with will-acts. Physics and history have thus absolutely different material ; the one can never deal with the substance of the other, and thus they are separated by a chasm, but their method is the same. Both connect their material ; both consider the single experience under the point of view of the totality, working from the special facts towards the general facts, from the experience toward the system.

Elsewhere in the same article Münsterberg states that history as distinguished from psychology has nothing to do with causal connections :

The manifoldness of will-acts, the totality of which forms my real personality, thus refers in every act to the will-acts and attitudes of other subjects which I acknowledge or oppose, imitate or overcome. These demands and suggestions of others are not in question in my life as causes or partial causes of my will ; they have not to be sought in the interest of a causal connection ; they are merely conditions which I as subject of attitude and acts presuppose for my free decision, and which are logically contained in it ; the connection is, therefore, not a causal, but merely a teleological one. The endless world of will-acts which stands thus in teleologically determining relation to our will-attitudes forms the only material of history.

As the practice of the historian does not agree with the logic of the method as Münsterberg has formulated it, he criticizes the practice :

A history which interprets subjectively and understands their purposes out of the deeds of men relinquishes, indeed, its only aim if it coördinates these teleological relations with the causal explanation of human happenings from climatic and geographical, technical and economical, physiological and pathological influences. The subject which is determined by purposes is free ; the action which is the effect of causes is unfree.

<sup>1</sup> A. D. Xénopol, *Les Principes Fondamentaux de l'Histoire* (Paris, 1899).



When Münsterberg wrote this paper the second part of Rickert's work had not appeared and a clear understanding of Rickert's logic of the historical method was not possible. I shall refer to Münsterberg's theory again in presenting the outline of Rickert's logic.

The point of view of Xénopol in *Les Principes Fondamentaux de l'Histoire* is closer to that of the first group of writers and agrees, for the most part, with the teachings of Rickert. All phenomena he divided into two classes, *coexistent facts*, afterwards called *repeated facts*, and *successive facts*.<sup>1</sup> The natural sciences deal with the former, the historical sciences with the latter. In a review of Rickert's volume in 1902 Xénopol formulated the substance of his theory of the historical method :

History deals only with phenomena individualized by time, that is to say, those that are produced but once in the course of the ages ; such a conception could not furnish opportunity for the formation of notions of law, but only for that of unique and particular series ; causality can only assume (in history) the same serial form and not that of repetition under the form of laws independent of time ; this conception applies as well to the history of the human mind as to that of the earth and organisms ; it is not in applying to history the method of the natural sciences that this discipline will be raised to the rank of a science, but it is necessary, on the contrary, to complete the logic of repetition by that of succession.<sup>2</sup>

Xénopol's work was valuable and interesting, but his formulation of the logic of historical method was not sufficiently definite. Are all successive facts historical facts? If not, by what means do we distinguish the essential, or historical successive facts, from the unessential? Xénopol did not answer that question.<sup>3</sup> More than that, two kinds of phenomena certainly do not exist. Repeated facts and successive facts are simply two points of view, all the facts of reality being unique and unrepeated. Failing to see that successive facts might also be repeated facts, if the unique in several series be eliminated, leaving only what is common in the succession, he denied the possibility of formulating sociological laws.

Rickert's complete treatise, containing both the negative portion of the theory that had appeared in 1896 and the new positive portion, was published in 1902. It was the first detailed attempt to formulate the logic of the historical method. Whatever may be the final judgment of logicians upon his theory, it is a serious piece of

<sup>1</sup> In the first chapter, "Les Phénomènes Coexistants et les Phénomènes Successifs," Xénopol presents his theory of the classification of the sciences. His most important contribution to the theory of historical synthesis is in chapters ten and eleven, where he deals with the historical series and causal connection.

<sup>2</sup> *Revue de Synthèse Historique* (June, 1902), 292.

<sup>3</sup> See Rickert's criticism of this point in *Die Grenzen der naturwiss. enstschäftlichen Begriffsbildung*, 450.

work and must be taken seriously.<sup>1</sup> It is not the outcome of the Lamprecht discussion, the theory having been conceived and partly formulated before any such discussion existed. It is likely to transform the old logic and, supplying a scientific basis for the methods of history and of natural science, put an end to a discussion that has lasted long and has been largely due to a mutual misunderstanding. There would seem, then, to be sufficient reasons for calling the attention of historians to the outlines of Rickert's logic of the historical sciences.

The attempt to formulate the logic of the historical sciences was the natural result of the conclusion reached by Rickert in 1888, that the object of a science determined what its method should be.<sup>2</sup> Unable to see how there could be a universal method, he naturally rejected the claims of universal applicability made for the method of the natural sciences. Instead of proceeding directly to formulate the logic of the historical sciences, he decided to clear the ground by determining the limits of the application of the natural-science method, or in his language, the limits to the formation of natural-science concepts. What the method of the natural science could not do must be done, clearly, by some other method. The problem was not one of research, but of the formulation of the results of research.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Lamprecht (*Die kulturhistorische Methode*, 24), while discussing the logic of the historical method, makes the following reference to Rickert's scholarly work: "Freilich kann man der Ideenlehre noch von einer anderen Seite zu Hilfe kommen. Man kann dogmatisch erklären, die singuläre Seite der Vorgänge sei in der Geschichte unter allen Umständen die wesentliche; da ihr Erfassen nur auf dem Wege der Idee erfolgen könne und die Ideen die Annahme einer historischen Kausalität ausschlossen, so sei eben die gewöhnliche herkömmliche Logik, welche auf dem Kausalitätsgesetze beruht, für die Geschichte nicht anwendbar, und es müsse deshalb deren Gültigkeit bestritten und eine neue, der Geschichte in Singulärauffassung und damit allen Geisteswissenschaften genügende Logik erst erfunden werden. Diesen Ausweg hat neuerdings ein Philosoph in der That vorgeschlagen; er braucht wohl nicht erst kritisiert zu werden." Certainly even if the book "does not deserve to be criticized," it deserves to be read carefully enough so that its contents may be correctly stated!

<sup>2</sup> In his monograph *Zur Lehre von der Definition*, 28, 29, Rickert expressed himself as follows: "Jede Wissenschaft hat vielmehr ihre eigene Methode, die sie sich selbst schafft, und die ihren Zielen und Absichten angemessen sein muss. Und wie wir das menschliche Denken nur aus dem Zwecke heraus verstehen können, dass es die Wahrheit finden will, so werden wir auch die Methoden der einzelnen Wissenschaften nur aus ihren speziellen Zwecken heraus begreifen. Wir müssen daher, um zu verstehen, was wesentliche und unwesentliche Merkmale sind, einzelne Wissenschaften gesondert betrachten. Für eine Universalmethode würde allerdings alles in der Welt gleich wesentlich sein. Für die Methode einer Sonderwissenschaft, die sich eine beschränkte Aufgabe stellt, kommt nur ein Theil des Weltganzen in Betracht, und die Unterscheidung des Wesentlichen und Unwesentlichen ist gar nicht zu umgehen. Ein Kriterium für die Unterscheidung können wir natürlich wieder nur aus der Aufgabe gewinnen, welche eine Wissenschaft stellt." See also *ibid.*, 39.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that it is a problem of the *Auffassung*, or synthesis, with which we have to do, of the way in which the facts are put together, and not criticism, the way in which

What, then, is the end of the natural sciences, or what is the task of the natural-science concept, and how is this end attained? The world of reality is manifold, endless in extent, and infinite in variety. To enable a finite mind to comprehend this reality some method of simplification is indispensable. The task of the natural-science concept is found in this attempt to overcome the extensive and intensive manifoldness of things for the purpose of attaining a scientific knowledge of the reality. The means for the accomplishment of this task are found already existent in the language of every day. The employment of terms, or concepts, to indicate what is common to a number of objects is a process of simplification and the beginning of the natural-science method. But in the common language these general terms are inexact and need to be modified somewhat before they can serve a scientific end; they must be not only general, but definite and universally valid. Their indefiniteness is due to the difficulty of separating general terms from special associations; this is overcome by definition and by the substitution of concepts of relations for concepts of things, indefiniteness being largely associated with concepts of things from which it is practically impossible to eliminate all traces of the perceptible reality. In pursuit of its ideal the natural-science method, striving to become ever more exact, transforms the concepts of things ever more into concepts of relations, until in the most highly developed form of natural science the thing has become a final thing, an atom. In mechanics we have the natural-science conception of corporeal nature. "Natural science teaches that the reality that presents itself to us as so endlessly manifold is at bottom always and everywhere the same. All variety and all change rest upon the movement of an unchangeable elementary substratum in space."<sup>1</sup> Just as mechanics works with final, imperceptible things called atoms and with a law of motion, so psychology for the world of mind deals with simple sensations — things that do not exist in reality — and the law of association. But the attainment of the ideal of the natural sciences does not depend alone upon the elimination of the perceptible from the concept, and the transformation of concepts of things into concepts of relations; it depends also upon the assumption that what is found to be true for a part of the reality is true for the whole of reality, in other words, that the concepts of natural science are universally valid.

we determine what the facts are, is an indication that the historian is progressing in the consciousness of his method. *Heuristik* and criticism do not enter into the discussion. So much has been won. This discussion will leave us with a clearer idea of what synthesis is.

<sup>1</sup> Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, 100.



The logical sense of the term nature, then, in the expression natural science, is not the reality *per se*, but the reality interpreted, looked at from the point of view of the general or universal. The more successful the method is in formulating general concepts, or laws, and in combining these laws into systems, the nearer it approaches to its ideal, but, at the same time, the less this system contains of the perceptible reality. In the interest of exactness, the natural-science method endeavors to eliminate this disturbing element as much as possible from its concepts, but into many of the natural sciences there enters a large historical element that interferes with the attainment of the ideal. In mechanics it is entirely absent, but it appears in physics, and increases as we pass through chemistry and biology to sociology. The physicist assumes the existence of light, heat, and sound, but it might well be asked, when and where did light first appear? Naturally this is a problem that, on account of lack of evidence, will never be solved, but the historical question of the origin of the chemical elements is one that can be treated and has already been treated. The presence of the historical element in the material that the natural scientist deals with does not modify the point of view in his work nor the application of the method. Whether it be the reality of social life, of organic life, of chemistry, or of physics, he always regards it from the point of view of the general; and his generalizations are valid for the portion of the reality with which he deals. As he passes from a narrower to a broader field, his laws are valid for more and more of the reality, but what they gain in comprehensiveness they lose in content. Although the laws or concepts of natural science assume the existence of the reality for which they are valid, the unique reality enters into its system only by way of example; and natural science, which aims to comprehend the reality under the point of view of the general, has no interest in the unique reality as such. No single event and no single series can be inferred from natural-science concepts that take cognizance only of the general. "We know that a certain seed brought to a certain place is fruitful; and we know that there are birds and insects that carry it; but that to exactly this place a bird or insect will bring this seed no natural scientist can foresee."<sup>1</sup> As natural science cannot foresee a unique event, no more can it tell us of the unique past. "Law has an ideal character, no bridge leads from it to the tangible reality."<sup>2</sup> As long as

<sup>1</sup> Richard M. Meyer, "Über die Möglichkeit historischer Gesetze," in *Historische Vierteljahrschrift* (April 14, 1903), 165. All that Meyer writes about the possibility of historical laws would be admitted as applying to sociological laws.

<sup>2</sup> Simmel, *Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*, 42.

its aim is to simplify the reality in order to comprehend it ; as long as it works with what is common to a number of objects and not with what is unique ; as long as it is forced to eliminate the perceptible in the interest of exactness, since the reality is unique and perceptible, it is evident that the nearer the natural-science method is to its ideal, the farther it is from the perceptible reality. The limit, then, to the formation of natural-science concepts is the unique and perceptible reality itself. If we desire to become acquainted with the unique and perceptible reality, we must use some other method than that of the natural sciences. That method is the method of the historical sciences.

The entire empirical reality (psychical as well as corporeal) can be regarded from a point of view entirely different from that of nature. It becomes nature when we consider it from the point of view of the general ; it becomes history when we regard it from the side of the particular. Every empirical science must set out from the directly experienced reality. The most general distinction in methods is to be sought in what the different sciences undertake to do with this reality, that is, it depends on whether they seek the general and the unreal (meaning that which cannot be perceived) in the form of a concept (or law), or the reality (the perceptible) in the special and individual. To natural science falls the one task, to historical science the other.<sup>1</sup>

The reality is unique. Nothing repeats itself and no two things are exactly alike. It is with this unique reality that historical science has to do. It cannot comprehend its endless and infinite manifoldness any more than the natural sciences were able to do, but it can comprehend a portion of the reality that could not be comprehended by the other method ; it can present something of the uniqueness of the reality and at the same time retain something of its perceptibility. It must simplify in order to comprehend, but it must simplify in a different manner from the natural sciences. It finds a starting-point in life just as the natural-science method did. Besides the common names, in the vulgar speech, it encounters proper names, terms applied to unique individuals ; it is a beginning of simplification. Not all unique things can enter into the historical sciences. How shall the essential be distinguished from the unessential ? It is the problem of the formation of the historical concept.

But concept suggests generalization, generalization suggests law, and the seeming impossibility of any other method than that of the natural sciences confronts us at the very beginning of the investigation. The difficulty is not so serious as it seems. We cannot think, it is true, without the use of general terms (such as man, king, war, peace), and these terms must be combined to form concepts, but not all concepts are concepts with general contents ; gen-

<sup>1</sup>Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, 255.

eral terms may be so combined as to give a concept with a unique, individual content. "Some men possess military genius" and "Napoleon possessed military genius" are both concepts, both contain general terms, but the introduction of the proper noun into the last sentence makes out of it a concept with an individual content, stating what was true of but one man in all the past. There have been many military geniuses, but there has been but one Napoleon who was a military genius. Concepts without proper names may, also, have individual contents.

It is not, however, yet clear what the bond is that binds the elements of the historical concept together. It cannot be simply the unique and individual that leads us to select one fact rather than another for our historical synthesis, for all facts and all things are individual, a piece of coal being as individual and unique as a Kohinoor diamond. Its uniqueness must be bound up with its indivisibility or unity. The unity of a piece of coal matters little, that of the Kohinoor diamond everything. It loses its uniqueness with its unity. The same is true of a piece of canvas and a head by Titian, a piece of clay and a Sevres vase. The unity of the object, then, has value for us. We have to do here with a question of value, with a standard. Every object in the reality is complex and may attract the attention of the scientist either because of characteristics that it has in common with other objects or because of its unique traits. If the value of an object is due to what is unique in it, it certainly cannot enter into a general concept. Moreover, in describing it the scientist may note only those characteristics upon which its uniqueness and consequently its unity rest.

We thus reach the method of simplification applied by the historian: he chooses from the endless number of individuals those that are valuable because they are unique, whose uniqueness is inseparable from their unity, and that thus have an importance because their loss or destruction would be irreparable. Our interest in an iron band is not historical; our interest in the iron crown of Lombardy is. To overcome the infinite manifoldness of the individual object the historian selects only those features of the object that are distinctive of it, that mark its unity and render it valuable.

The use of the word value seems to introduce an uncertain and arbitrary element into the problem. Valuable for whom? How can there be any agreement among historians touching what unique facts shall be chosen? Will the history of the Reformation written by a Catholic resemble that written by a Protestant? Will the opponents of the French Revolution select the same facts for their synthesis as have been selected by the supporters of it? Undoubt-

edly, if they proceed scientifically. The question of value is not a question of partizanship nor of approval or disapproval ; it is a question of importance. Is this fact important for the history of the Reformation? Is an account of the Reformation intelligible without it? The Protestant may love Luther, the Catholic may hate him, but they would agree that Luther is important for the history of the Reformation. This question of values is not decided by popular vote, by the man upon the street, any more than the laws of natural science are settled by careless, unscientific inference. They are the result of careful study and persistent discussion among scientists. The progress in historical synthesis means a growing agreement among scientific historians touching the important facts of this or that period. The historical method is thus teleological in a certain sense. The subject of an historical investigation is a unique thing, the life of an historical personage, a battle, an economic crisis, a period in the life of a people. It forms a unit and its value depends on its unity. It has beginning and end. We know what the end was, and we wish to know what the chain of events was that led up to the final event. We seek such facts, to be wrought up into a synthesis, as may be necessary to show how the end was attained.

The unique individuals with which the historian works are not necessarily persons nor are they single events ; they may be the life of a people, the evolution of European society, the evolution of world society, the evolution of the visible universe. Moreover, these individuals are not isolated facts. Only art treats isolated individuals, and history is not art.<sup>1</sup> It deals with a related body of truth ; and each of its unique individuals, each of its units, is part of a larger individual or unit and can be understood only when treated in relation to a larger whole. The Protestant Reformation is intelligible only when treated as a part of that larger whole that embraces the entire reform movement in the Latin church in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries ; again, the history of the Reformation as a whole must be treated as a part of the whole history of the church, embracing the Eastern and Western churches, or it may be looked upon as a part of the historical life of Europe. The smaller unit is always related to a larger one until the limits of the visible universe are reached, for history deals with the whole of reality. This is the common practice of trained historians to-day, and yet they have been charged with dealing with isolated facts. Münsterberg confounded the formation of larger and larger generalizations, after the manner of natural science, with this grouping of

<sup>1</sup> Jonas Cohn, *Allgemeine Ästhetik* (Leipzig, 1901), 35, 36; Münsterberg, *Psychology and Life*, chapter entitled "Psychology and Art," 145-178.



unique facts into larger and larger wholes. The difference is an important one and is the second point of difference between the two methods. In the selection of the elements for its synthesis, natural science chooses what is common to a number of facts; historical method selects what is important for the whole. What Luther has in common with other Germans might be important for the sociologist; it would not be for historians. It was just the thing that was unique in Luther, that distinguished him from other Germans, that rendered him important for the Reformation and for the whole subsequent life of Germany, that makes him an historical character. In the second place, the synthesis of natural science differs from that of historical science in that the former treats the individual fact as an example under a law, while the latter treats it as a complex part of a complex whole. In natural science, the more comprehensive the generalization, the thinner its content; in historical science, the larger the concept, so much the richer it is. The whole Reformation is more complex and richer in content than any of the parts of the Reformation in Germany, Switzerland, France, Spain, or the Netherlands, because it embraces them all. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that while the whole is more complex and richer in content than any of its parts, the part retains its individuality and does not simply appear as the illustration of a law. If Buckle could discover no logical synthesis in the works of such a man as Ranke, it was because he was blind to every form of synthesis but that of natural science. When Münsterberg asserts that "Every science considers the single facts in their relations to other facts, works toward connections," he is simply stating what has always been the practice of historians; but when he adds "towards generalities," he is stating what is not the practice and what could not be the practice if history is to remain history. His failure to note that the relation of the fact to other facts is not necessarily that of an example under a law, of a less abstract thing to a more abstract, but may be that of a complex part to a complex whole, leads him to the illogical conclusion that the method of natural science does not differ from that of historical science.

Not only does historical science select the facts important for the whole, instead of those common to all; not only does it treat these units as parts of a complex whole instead of examples under a law; but it traces the causal connection between the facts. How can it trace causal connection without discovering laws and thus applying the method of the natural science? The confusion here is due to another misunderstanding as fundamental as those touching the selecting and grouping of the facts. Causality as a principle,

namely, that there is no effect produced in the empirical reality without a cause, has been treated as synonymous with natural law, that is, that the cause is equal to the effect. From one point of view, the cause is always equal to the effect; it is the point of view of natural science and is true only when we have eliminated what is unique from the series. From another point of view, the cause is never equal to the effect; it is the point of view of historical science. In the first case we speak of causal law; in the second, of causal connection. The points of view are complementary. I describe the battle of Waterloo and trace the causal connection up to the great disaster; I may find small causes producing big effects; it is the truth from one point of view. It cannot be denied that the natural-science method may be applied to the study of the material from which I constructed my historical synthesis, and may produce something quite different. Neither synthesis is false. The points of view are different; that is all. Because paper may be used for writing a letter does not debar us, on an occasion, from using it to light a fire.

The logic of the historical concept is not yet complete. History deals with the reality, and the reality is ever in motion. Our concept must be enriched by the idea of evolution. The expression has many meanings; it is necessary to fix upon one of them as containing the historical idea. Historical evolution means not simply motion, nor change, but a change that is unique and is important on account of its uniqueness. Motion and change, being common to all reality, cannot be the forms of evolution that we are seeking for. Natural science may treat of changes that are repeated and may formulate the laws of change. Sociology, dealing with social data from the point of view of the general, may trace the general process of social evolution, deriving its generalizations from several series of social changes. But a change that is historical must not only be unique, one that has never appeared before and can never appear again in our world, but it must be important on account of its newness. The evolutionary series that the historian constructs is teleological; it has a well-defined beginning and end, and passes through certain definite stages; each stage is important *per se*, and the individual facts are important because they contributed to a certain result.

There are two peculiarities of the absolute historical concept that still remain to be noticed. The natural-science concept is rendered definite by eliminating, as much as possible through definition, the perceptible that clings to the concept. The historical method, whose aim it is to keep as close as possible to the percep-

tible reality, cannot employ this method. It renders its concept definite by producing a clear image of the person or event that it is treating. It often uses for this purpose more material than appears to be logically necessary. The historian, to make definite the concept of Luther, of Napoleon, or of Bismarck, of the Diet of Worms, the retreat from Moscow, or the crowning of the Prussian king at Versailles, uses such material as may be necessary in his judgment to render perceptible the uniqueness of the person or the event. It is this end in view that justifies the description of personal traits, the reproduction of characteristic sayings, and of photographs of persons and places. The second peculiarity is encountered in the treatment of causal connection.

Every actual evolutionary series forms a continuous whole, but if it is divided into definite, teleologically essential stages, the gradual transition from stage to stage is destroyed. A science of the reality cannot permit such gaps to exist, but must fill them out with causal beginnings, that the various stages may be at the same time teleologically distinct and causally connected with one another. Everywhere where this is necessary, constituent parts of the reality become essential that are not teleologically necessary.<sup>1</sup>

This accounts for the appearance of secondary persons and events. In the interest of causal connection the writer of an historical biography may and does introduce secondary individuals and events, simply in the interest of causal connection or explanation.

The form of the absolute historical concept is now complete. In forming his concept the historian employs general terms, but he combines them to form a concept with an individual content; the natural scientist forms concepts with general contents. The historian selects unique objects, important for the whole that he is treating, and selects the features of the object that render it important for the whole group; the natural scientist selects the features that are common to all the members of a group. The historian combines his unique, complex individuals into ever larger and more complex wholes, rendering them definite by retaining as far as possible their perceptible characteristics, and tracing the causal connection; the natural scientist forms his concepts into systems that are ever more comprehensive and consequently less complex or more abstract, and seeks for natural laws in which the cause is treated as equal to the effect. The natural scientist deals with the changing reality, but with changes that repeat themselves and thus render generalization possible; the historian deals with a unique teleological series with definite parts, but bound together in the interest of causal connection by elements that are not teleologically essential.

<sup>1</sup> Rickert, *Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung*, 474.



Were we permitted to deal solely with the absolute concepts in natural science and in historical science, the misunderstanding between the two groups of scientists would be of but short duration. Unfortunately for the peace of mind of truth-seeking men, there are also relative historical concepts; and, more unfortunately still, a relative historical concept does not differ in form from the relative concept in natural science, or the concept that is valid only for a portion of the reality. To render the situation even more confusing, it is possible to have a historical concept that is more comprehensive than a scientific concept. This fact would seem to point to the unsoundness of the claim of the historian to the possession of a method logically different from that of the natural scientist. Every historical narrative contains concepts made up of elements that are common to a group of objects. The description of the condition of the French army on the eve of the Franco-Prussian war, of the German peasants in the time of Luther, of the French peasants under the old régime, deals with a group and forms a concept from what is common to a group and seemingly forms a general concept. This fact does not, however, change the logic of the historical method. The resemblance between the two methods is superficial. Just as the natural-science method, although dealing with a limited portion of the reality, into which the historical element enters, regards it from the point of view of the general and forms concepts valid for all the reality under investigation, so the historical method treats its large groups as unique, complex wholes and selects only such features of the groups as may be sufficient to characterize it. The aims are different; one concept is relatively general, the other is relatively individual. To base a logic of historical method upon concepts with general contents would be impossible, as there is no means of knowing before investigation whether the historically important in a certain portion of the reality can be exhausted by relative historical concepts.

Rickert does not conclude his treatise with the discussion of the logic of the form of the historical concept. He devotes a chapter to the content of the concept, for the purpose of making clear why man is the center of all historical syntheses and why the values with which the historian deals are culture or social values. He goes even further, and realizing that the question may be and has been raised as to whether history, even if it be a science, may make the same claims to objectivity as natural science, he turns in the last chapters of his book to the consideration of this problem and shows that the *apriori* of natural science outnumber those of historical science.

The compression of the arguments of a closely-reasoned work of seven hundred and forty pages into a score of pages is a thankless task and can never serve as a substitute for the original work; it can give little more than conclusions. The arguments justifying these conclusions must be sought in the work itself. It is no new method that Rickert has given; he has endeavored to show that the method that the historian has always employed and employs to-day is the logical one for him to use for the attainment of the end that he has in view; he shows, furthermore, that that end is justifiable and history is even more empirically objective than natural science. As social facts are a part of the empirical reality, he shows that a natural-science point of view is possible for society and that it may even be possible to formulate the laws of social evolution—but these laws are not historical laws, the laws of a unique series. An historical law, a law of what has happened but once and cannot happen again, is a *contradictio in adjecto*.<sup>1</sup>

The sociologists and the historians should endeavor to understand each other. At the conclusion of a review of Rickert's logic, based upon an article that gave, and intended to give, only a partial view of it, Lacombe seemed to realize that the difference between the methods of the sociologist and of the historian is due to a difference in point of view, and exclaimed: "Truly, at the end, it seems to me that our debate reduces itself and ends in very small proportions and amounts simply to this: M. Rickert says, 'What you call sociology may be what you will, but not history; I refuse to give it this name, this title.'—And I reply: 'Very well, so be it. We will reserve the name of history for the exposition of past events, such as has been practiced by that kind of studies in all times; but we shall continue to study events in an entirely different manner from you; we shall choose in the matter, in the historical reality, other aspects, other relations than those that alone have the privilege of interesting you; and we shall form a science different from yours. This science will be called sociology or philosophical history, or scientific history, it matters little what, but it will be always history, in this sense, that the historical fact, the human past, will always, indeed, be the object of our science as it is the object of yours.'"

When a sociologist writes like that, the discussion must be near its end. If historians and sociologists can agree that both deal with the past of society, but from different points of view; that one looks at it from the point of view of a unique evolution, and the other from the point of view of general facts and laws; that as their ends

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

differ, their methods must differ; that there would be no confusion if we retained the term history for the older point of view and employed the term sociology for the later—if these fundamental points could be agreed upon, the debate would be over. Much that has been written in the course of the debate from Comte to Lamprecht is beside the mark. To argue that the natural-science method can be applied to the study of social facts is not to argue that the historical method is outgrown or that sociology can take the place of history. That would seem to be the fundamental defect in the position of Lamprecht. The historical method has not failed to keep abreast of the other sciences because it has not transformed itself into a natural science.<sup>1</sup> Historical method has progressed, not only in criticism, as Lamprecht acknowledges,<sup>2</sup> but also in synthesis. How can any intelligent man who is not blinded by the belief that the natural-science method is the universal method compare the syntheses of European history produced in the past one hundred years with the syntheses upon the same subjects that were the products of preceding centuries, and say that the modern syntheses are not sounder and more scientific, that we are not working out a synthesis that will finally be accepted in its main outlines by scientific historians the world over? Even to-day historians are agreed upon the general outline of European history, and if they do disagree upon details, so do the natural scientists. Because these latter gentlemen cannot agree upon so fundamental a thing as whether acquired characteristics are transmitted, nobody thinks of substituting the historical method for the natural science method or of dubbing biology an art.

Buckle was both harsh and hasty in his condemnation of historians. To characterize as intellectually inferior the men whose names lend dignity to the long list beginning with Herodotus and extending, in his day, to Ranke, is pardonable only on the ground of youth. That he could not see that men were beginning to examine social phenomena from a new point of view, but that the new point of view did not render the old superfluous, is more intelligible. It is less intelligible after the discussion has lasted for a half-century, after sociology has taken shape and it is known that it is not history and cannot take the place of history. At a time when historical synthesis is steadily increasing in quantity and improving in quality, and when logic itself has at length justified the historical method, it would seem that the time had come to cease treating the

<sup>1</sup> See the pertinent remarks of Xénopoli on the natural growth of a method, in the *Revue de Synthèse Historique* (October, 1901), 174-176.

<sup>2</sup> Lamprecht, *Die kulturhistorische Methode*, 16.

old method as an outgrown point of view, as a kind of alchemy or astrology. As long as men seek for knowledge of the unique evolution of their social past, just so long will the historical method be justifiable and the historical synthesis, the synthesis of Thucydides, of Polybius, of Tacitus, of Gibbon, and of Ranke, will be scientific, although it will never be the synthesis of the natural sciences.

FRED MORROW FLING.









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